

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Thursday, October 8, 2009

Second Wyoming Flu Death Reported as Flu is Widespread in State

The second death of a Wyoming resident infected with the swine (novel H1N1) influenza virus has been reported to the Wyoming Department of Health as flu activity continues to be high and widespread across the state.

The adult female resident of Laramie County had underlying health conditions linked with higher risk of severe illness.

“This death is certainly sad to acknowledge. Unfortunately, a few people die in Wyoming every year due to flu complications,” said Dr. Tracy Murphy, state epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health. “We have known this would also be likely with H1N1.” In the previous nine years, up to 11 flu-related deaths have been reported per year in Wyoming.

“Flu activity around Wyoming right now is high. In fact, case numbers are as high or higher than the peaks reported during a number of recent winters with seasonal influenza,” Murphy said.

Since late May, 1014 cases of influenza have been reported to the department. A very large (58 percent) portion of this total has been reported over the last three weeks. The department expects the number of actual flu infections around the state to be much higher because most ill persons do not seek medical care or are not tested.

Over the same timeframe, the department has received reports of 19 hospitalizations among Wyoming residents in connection with the swine flu virus. “As our overall flu numbers climb, we can expect to see more hospitalizations and possibly deaths in our state,” Murphy said.

Murphy said the department’s surveillance shows Wyoming’s flu activity is almost 100 percent due to the novel H1N1 flu strain. “The illness remains similar to seasonal flu, and isn’t showing any indications of change,” he added. Influenza symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches and fatigue. Some patients also report diarrhea and vomiting.

“Everyone should watch for signs and symptoms of flu and take proper precautions should illness appear,” Murphy said. Recommended measures to slow the spread of illness include:

- When available, get immunized with both a swine flu and a seasonal flu vaccine.
- In general, people who develop influenza-like illness should stay home from work, school or travel until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever. Those who are severely ill (such as having trouble breathing) should seek medical care.
- Avoid contact with ill persons.
- Frequent hand washing with soap and water or the use of an alcohol-based hand gel.
- Covering noses and mouths with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing, and throwing used tissues in a trash can.

Of the total 1014 reported flu cases in Wyoming since late May, 341 have been confirmed as swine flu cases. Specific swine (novel H1N1) flu counts provided by the department only reflect cases confirmed by specialized lab testing as the H1N1 strain as part of the department's ongoing surveillance activities.

More information about swine flu in Wyoming is available online at www.health.wyo.gov .

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